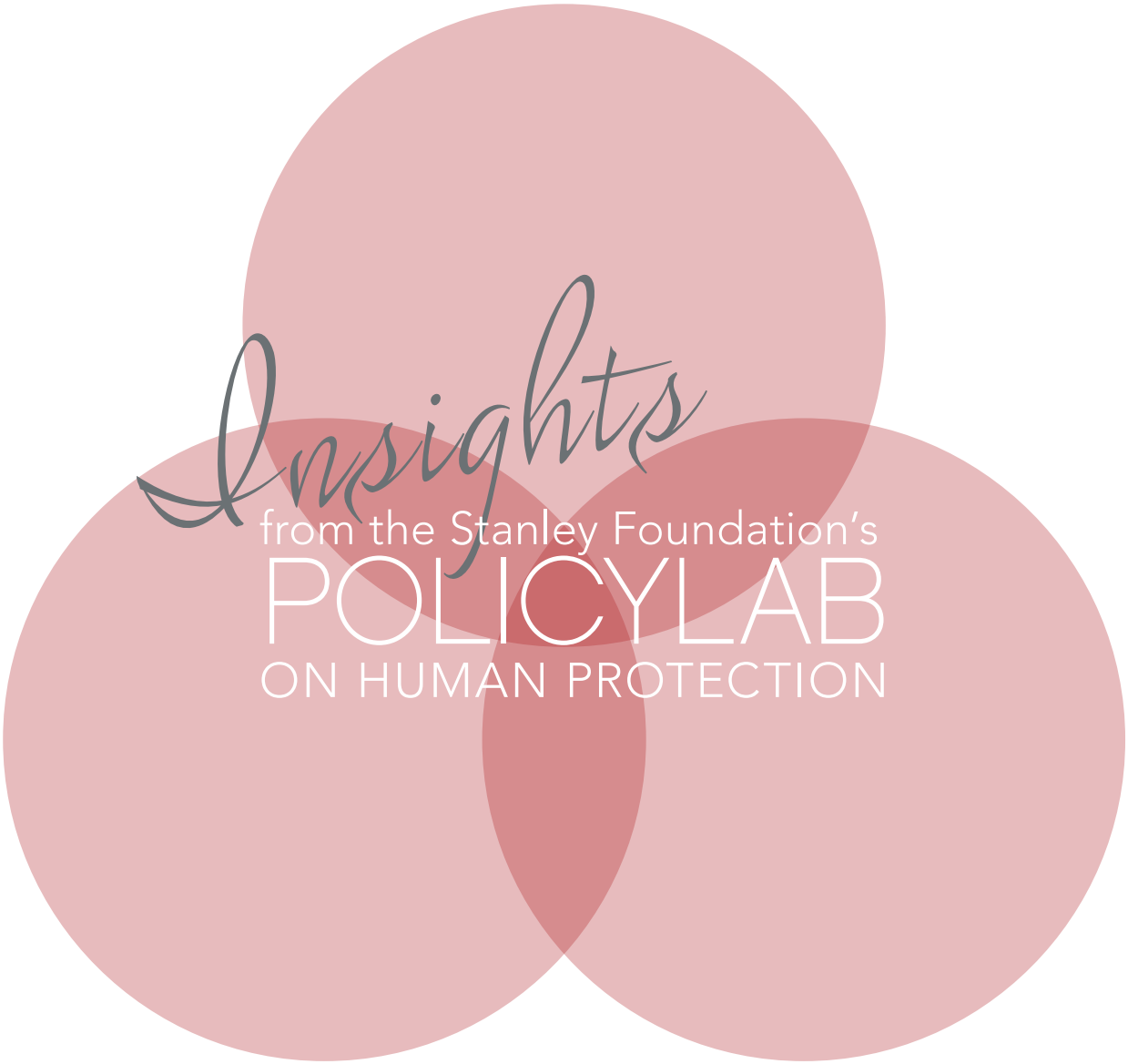

Human Protection: Strategic Opportunities in a Challenging Political Environment

By Charles J. Brown

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Insights from the Stanley Foundation's Policy Lab on Human Protection

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The facilitator, Charles J. Brown, prepared this report following the Stanley Foundation's Policy Lab on Human Protection. It is a summary of the insights gained from interviews he conducted in advance of and ideas generated in the policy lab, not merely a descriptive account of discussion in the policy lab. Neither those interviewed nor policy lab participants reviewed or approved the report. Therefore, it should not be assumed that they subscribe to the recommendations, observations, and conclusions in this report.

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Executive Summary

The cause of human protection finds itself at a crossroads. Despite unprecedented recognition that effective collective action can help prevent, slow, or stop outbreaks of mass violence, recent events, including the crisis in Syria, have raised serious questions about whether effective global cooperation on preventing genocide and mass atrocities is still possible.

It is in this climate that the Stanley Foundation commissioned an interview-based assessment and then convened a diverse group of experts for a two-day policy lab to discuss challenges facing the field. Participants identified strategic opportunities for smart action that could sustain, and in some cases advance, the cause of human protection.

1. **Prioritize early prevention.** A renewed focus on early prevention remains the best means available to limit the risk, frequency, and severity of mass violence. Early prevention can reduce incentives for political, ethnic, and religious conflict; encourage good governance, the rule of law, and transparency; and bolster national, regional, and international stability.

2. **Support regional, subregional, and cross-regional initiatives.** Regional groups (such as the African Union), subregional organizations (such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations), and cross-regional gatherings (such as Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes) offer better opportunities for collaboration than the United Nations, helping to overcome the great power politics that hinder effective collective action.

3. **Empower local actors to lead human protection efforts.** The human protection community needs to support local civil society organizations, particularly those operating in fragile or failed states, without putting them at risk or making them too reliant on outside support.

4. **Strengthen the United Nations' capacity for proximate prevention.** Although the United Nations has made significant progress in shifting from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention, there is still much to be done to give it the capacity to act before a crisis spins out of control.

5. **Increase demand for transitional justice.** Strengthening transitional justice and accountability must remain a priority. In addition to reforming the International Criminal Court, other ideas worth exploring include empowering victims to play a greater role in transitional justice, making judicial procedures more accessible, and pursuing new community-based approaches.

6. **Adopt a more rights-centric approach to countering violent extremism.** The United Nations should develop a rights-centric set of accountable and transparent best practices that focus on empowerment from the bottom up, not security from the top down.

These approaches will require patience, pragmatism, and a determined optimism that does not let recent setbacks overwhelm past progress. There is also a need to break down traditional stovepipes and hierarchies to build multistakeholder coalitions that operate across geographies and issue areas. Closer collaboration among multilateral institutions, national governments, international nongovernmental organizations, and local civil society also will be essential. So too will a willingness by government and private donors to rethink who, how, what, and when they fund.

Introduction

Nearly 25 years after the dual tragedies of Rwanda and Bosnia, those working on human protection find themselves at an unprecedented—and unexpected—crossroads. On one hand, there is a widespread recognition that effective collective action can help prevent, slow, or stop outbreaks of mass violence. On the other hand, a series of recent events—most notably the failure of the international community to respond effectively to the crisis in Syria, the rise of populist nationalist movements, and renewed discord within the United Nations Security Council—have raised fears of a major retreat from global acceptance of and cooperation on preventing the worst crimes imaginable, including genocide and mass atrocities.

It is in this uncertain climate that the Stanley Foundation commissioned an interview-based assessment of its current human protection programming and convened a two-day policy lab on opportunities and challenges facing the overall field. Although the assessment and lab are key components of the foundation's own strategy-development process, they also represent an opportunity to explore how the broader human protection community could work together more effectively to identify policy approaches that could help overcome the challenges posed by a newly fragile and increasingly fragmented international liberal order.

Working from a common definition of *human protection*—"collective action to prevent, respond to, or help communities recover from mass violence"—lab participants were asked to brainstorm bold policy goals and strategic opportunities. They discussed a number of audacious ideas, including the establishment of a global prevention trust fund, the adoption of an international convention on state surveillance, the creation of a global mediators network, and the elimination of the permanent-member veto in cases where the Security Council is confronting an atrocity situation.[1]

This insights paper discusses those ideas that garnered the most interest and discussion over the course of the policy lab and the interview-based assessment. It offers a snapshot of the views of some of the field's leading thinkers and advocates at a time of transition and uncertainty. But it should not be regarded as either a comprehensive overview of the field or a summary of every concept explored during the lab.[2]

Lab participants and interviewees agreed to speak and be quoted on a nonattribution basis to ensure a frank discussion but agreed to be identified as having taken part in the process.[3] Their views do not represent those of the governments, international institutions, think tanks, universities, or nongovernmental organizations for which they work.[4]

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Human Protection in a Challenging Political Environment

In the years since the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the international community has significantly strengthened and expanded its capacity to prevent, respond to, and help countries recover from mass violence. Although it has been slow and often fitful, there has been real progress: the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to bring to justice those responsible for the worst imaginable crimes; recognition by the UN General Assembly of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P); the rise of grassroots movements pushing for international action to end the genocide in Darfur and to arrest (and prosecute) the leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army; and the continued growth of international networks of civil society actors and government focal points.

In addition, a number of governments, most notably the United States, have adopted policies and procedures to coordinate their response to potential atrocity situations, in the process developing a range of diplomatic, economic, development, and other tools to help ensure that military action is not the only option. In those cases where early prevention failed, effective collective action at the multilateral and regional level has helped avert, slow, or prevent atrocities in a number of crisis situations, including the Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Iraq (Mt. Sinjar), Liberia, and Mali.[5]

That said, developments over the past several years have raised serious concerns that much of this progress is now at risk. In retrospect, it is clear that the backsliding began with what was then regarded as a high-water mark of atrocity prevention and response: the 2011 NATO-Arab League campaign in Libya. Although sanctioned by the United Nations as a mission to prevent atrocities and protect civilians, the subsequent fall of the Qaddafi regime and the country's descent into anarchy have raised serious questions about the utility, efficacy, and long-term impact of collective action.

Many participants regarded Libya as the beginning of a broader crisis. As one noted, countries such as Russia and China "concluded that [these kinds of measures] were window dressing for soft coups, regime changes, and color revolutions—and that they wouldn't allow [atrocity prevention] to be invoked again." Although collective action remains possible, it now usually takes place only on the periphery of great power politics, in states where Russia, China, or the United States do not have vested interests.

The fact that Libya subsequently fell into chaos has raised additional questions about the role and responsibility of the international community once an intervention ends. To some, this failure to sustain engagement was as deadly as the controversy over intervening in the first place. "The big mistake wasn't going in," one participant argued. "It was abandoning them."

After Libya, there was little appetite for a similar response to the crisis in Syria. Russia and China opposed what they saw as another poorly disguised attempt at regime change. The Obama administration, particularly in the aftermath of the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi, showed little interest in pushing for another military intervention, especially given its expectation that the Assad regime would fall any day.

But contrary to expectations, it did not—in part because of its willingness to commit the worst crimes imaginable against its own citizens. That said, the regime's inability to retain control over large swaths of territory created a governance vacuum in which Islamic extremists, secular rebels, and government forces battled to a bloody standstill. Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have died, and millions more have fled their homes.

The events in Syria have had an impact far beyond its borders: the rise of the Islamic State and other terrorist groups, the largest refugee crisis since World War II, the destabilization of the European Union, and the fracturing of international legal norms. And as a number of participants noted, it also gave lie to the idea that the international community would always act to prevent the worst crimes. "After all the books, studies, and resolutions, we were unwilling or unable to prevent mass atrocities," one said. "We did all this norm-setting and then we didn't act." Another put it more succinctly: "Syria wrecked so much."

Two other developments also have done great damage to the potential for future collective action. The first is the growth of populist-nationalist movements in Europe and the United States. The second is the reemergence of Russia under Vladimir Putin, whose government has repeatedly dismissed international legal norms and sponsored mass violence in Ukraine and Syria. The two are not unrelated: Putin's support for like-minded parties and candidates has helped encourage the growth of what Michael McFaul of Stanford University has called the "illiberal international"—a loose coalition of regimes and movements that embrace an assertive, often aggressive, vision of state sovereignty and reject most forms of international cooperation and collective action.[6]

These developments have challenged the liberal international order in ways that its champions are still struggling to understand. As one participant observed, "We didn't see geopolitics going back to being driven by self-interest." Many participants expressed concern that a wide range of initiatives, institutions, and even treaties would no longer be regarded as norms. "We got too excited after R2P," another said. "We thought we had a new paradigm. But now things are heading downhill. And no one wants to hear that."

As a result, what had been a widespread international consensus on collective action to prevent or respond to mass violence now faces its greatest challenge since Rwanda. As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said recently, "There is growing anxiety that the world is not heading in 'the right direction,' that States are not fully coming together around shared solutions and that global institutions are not sufficiently equipped to deal effectively with the challenges at hand."[7] Many participants agreed. "The deep trend is toward the destruction of norms," one said.

Some participants went further, questioning whether there were even norms to be saved. "People say that the liberal international order is under attack," one observed. "But what exactly are we trying to save? The current system was built on a hierarchy, with the rights of some states more important than others. Economic justice was never really meant to be on the table." Several argued that the United States and European Union member states have been highly selective in their embrace of the liberal order. "Our governments are claiming that they are in a position to protect civilians even though they are among those perpetrating the violence," one said. "We helped create these huge global issues, even as we pretend to be the [solution]."

Strategic Opportunities to Revitalize Human Protection

During the policy lab and in the interviews conducted for the assessment, participants identified a number of strategic opportunities that could benefit from innovative ideation and action. Despite concerns about the state of the liberal world order, most remain hopeful, determined to explore new ways to confront the challenges posed by a radically different international environment. What follows are summaries of the six issues that generated the most interest, discussion, and debate.

Place an Even Greater Priority on Early Prevention

Participants believe that a renewed focus on early prevention—which this paper defines as "initiatives that reduce social marginalization and conflict; strengthen legitimacy, accountability, and resilience; and promote respect for human rights"—remains the best means available to limit the risk, frequency, and severity of mass violence.[8] Early prevention can reduce incentives for political, ethnic, and religious conflict; encourage good governance, the rule of law, and transparency; and bolster national, regional, and international stability.[9]

According to a recent study by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), a rough doubling of current spending on early prevention could save as much as $3 trillion in direct and indirect losses from conflict over the next ten years. As the study notes, "For every dollar invested now, the cost of conflict [could] be reduced by $16 over the long run."[10] The decrease would come not only from a significant reduction in current expenditures on humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping but also via an across-the-board decline in losses generated as a result of mass violence, population dislocations, political destabilization, economic disintegration, and regional instability.[11]

Yet despite such findings, early prevention remains far less understood, embraced, or—most critically—funded by governments and international institutions. The problem, as the psychologist Daniel Kahneman has written, is that "the human mind does not deal well with nonevents."[12] It is far easier for donors and politicians to respond to an immediate crisis than to anticipate a future one. Many policymakers see prevention as unprovable; even when it is possible to demonstrate that effective action has prevented a crisis from spinning out of control, it is very difficult to show quantitative results such as lives saved or refugees kept at home. As a result, donor support for early prevention initiatives continues to represent a relatively small percentage of overall foreign assistance. According to the IEP, funding for early prevention in those countries at greatest risk of mass violence and civil conflict totaled only $6.8 billion in 2013, just 16 percent of the total assistance provided to those countries.[13]

As long as governments and multilateral institutions continue to scrimp on early prevention, they will continue spending far more when responding to immediate crises. Given that it takes an average of 40 years for countries to restore stable governance and the rule of law after extreme violence such as civil war, mass atrocities, and genocide, this approach is fundamentally counterintuitive—the equivalent of ignoring a patient's heart disease and then spending hundreds of thousands of dollars for a transplant whose long-term prognosis for success remains low.[14]

Participants strongly favored a renewed push for greater investment in and policy support for early prevention. As one put it, "We've hardly scratched the surface. When you look at societies facing sustained interethnic conflict and extreme security abuses, we know where these pathways lead. If we could do a better job at the

outer ends of the [pre- and post-conflict] spectrum, there would be less to do in the middle." Another agreed. "Concerted early action is essential. We need to raise the sense of urgency and alarm—and take more decisive action—earlier."

Secretary-General Guterres has expressed similar views. In a recent vision statement distributed to all permanent representatives of UN member states, he wrote, "Prevention should permeate everything we do. It should cut across all pillars of the UN's work.... This means promptly identifying and responding to early signs of tension, using all tools available."[15] In an accompanying letter, he announced that he has asked his senior advisor on policy to map the United Nations' prevention capabilities "with the view of creating a platform that enables us to make the best use of our many assets."[16] As of this writing, it remains unclear whether Guterres will be able to convince member states—or the UN system itself—to support such a fundamental reorienting of priorities.

Another issue highlighted by participants was the need to link early warning to early prevention. Initiatives such as the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Early Warning Project, the Global Center on the Responsibility to Protect's R2P Monitor, and various governments' open source intelligence reports provide a fairly clear picture of which countries are at most risk of mass violence. To date, however, there have been only limited efforts to tie these findings to funding and policy priorities. As one participant pointed out, "research isn't translating into action."

Participants also believed that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have tremendous potential as an organizing mechanism for work on early prevention. In particular, the values articulated in SDG Goal 16 reinforce the human protection agenda and offer opportunities to engage a broader range of actors. Goal 16 "brings so many different streams together—peacebuilding, atrocity prevention, development, justice, governance," one participant said. "That is a real breakthrough."

Convincing governments to fund early prevention will be neither quick nor easy. It will entail a shift from focusing on imminent crises to addressing underlying conflict dynamics, with no guarantee of measurable results or visible success. As one participant pointed out, "The question we can never answer is whether—or where—early prevention has actually helped prevent conflicts."[17] Nonetheless, tying research to policy, developing new tools, and securing sufficient political and financial support for timely early action could make a huge difference.

Support Regional, Subregional, and Cross-Regional Initiatives

Participants also explored how regional, subregional, and cross-regional initiatives could help short circuit the great power politics that often hinder effective collective action. As a recent draft Stanley Foundation working paper noted, "Working outside of international fora gets around the gridlock plaguing the [UN] system and allows regional, national, and local actors to 'own' the solutions to their prevention challenges."[18]

For this to happen, several challenges will need to be addressed. First, governments will need to transition from their traditional preference for one-size-fits-all solutions to more tailored approaches that recognize the interests of multiple stakeholders and emphasize local solutions. As one participant said, this requires "a much more sophisticated way of working. You're going to have to pull in many actors from different backgrounds. There will be differences on what the idea [of protection] means, how you sell it, and how it happens."

Second, with the United States turning inward and the European Union fracturing, there is an unprecedented opportunity for governments and multilateral bodies in the Global South to lead. This is particularly true of regional organizations such as the African Union (AU) and the Organization of American States (OAS) and subregional groupings such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). What remains unclear is whether they are up to the task.

To date, a range of initiatives in Africa have shown the most promise. The AU, the SADC, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) have developed mechanisms to promote peace and security and prevent conflict. Several have gone so far as to establish regional military forces in order to conduct peacekeeping operations.

These efforts have produced decidedly mixed results. As one recent study of African atrocity prevention efforts noted, many African-led initiatives have suffered from "a blind culture of neutrality that treats all parties as morally equivalent," pursuing "peace at any price in the face of a credible threat of atrocities."[19] In Liberia (ECOWAS), the Central African Republic (ECCAS), Burundi (ICGLR), and South Sudan (IGAD), subregional bodies have struggled to end conflicts, coordinate peace processes, and prevent further mass violence.[20]

That said, there are also success stories. One notable example is ECOWAS's recent response to the election crisis in the Gambia, which, as described in a recent Stanley Foundation publication, was a textbook example of how a subregional organization, in cooperation with the UN Office on West Africa and the Security Council, "can take timely action when states are manifestly failing to prevent [atrocities] from occurring."[21] Most importantly, ECOWAS took early action (including the threat of military intervention) to get out ahead of a rapidly deteriorating situation before it could spin out of control.

Outside of Africa, regional and subregional organizations have demonstrated little capacity or willingness to promote early prevention or take effective action in the face of mass violence. In Latin America (Venezuela), the Middle East (Syria), and Asia (Myanmar), rapidly deteriorating crises have provoked little or no response from, respectively, the OAS, the Arab League, and the ASEAN. "These are bodies that are supposed to do preventive work," one participant said. "They rarely [do]. We need to go a lot deeper into seeing how they can fulfill a function that they have never really tried to pursue."

Another approach worth considering is what participants variously called "micro-multilateralism" and "functional multilateralism." The idea, as one described it, is to have "five or ten committed states" from multiple regions come together to discuss and shape an issue in ways that the United Nations, regional organizations, and subregional bodies cannot. Recent examples include highly informal gatherings such as the so-called atrocity prevention coffee group that meets on the margins of the UN General Assembly and more established networks such as the Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention, Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes, and the Community of Democracies.

Such arrangements have helped create space for governments to explore ideas and approaches to a greater extent than in more structured settings. They also have gen-

erated opportunities for governments to engage and encourage the involvement of civil society, including historically marginalized groups.[22] Micromultilateral networks also can serve as incubators for broader initiatives, much as past civil-society-government dialogues helped build momentum for the Rome (International Criminal Court) and Ottawa (landmine ban) Treaties.

Empower Local Actors to Lead Human Protection Efforts

Over the past several years, civil society advocates—who are often the front line in any effort to promote human rights and social justice—have come under assault as increasingly illiberal governments such as Russia, Turkey, and the Philippines have grown less tolerant of dissent. Participants agreed that multilateral institutions, friendly governments, and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) need to find ways to more effectively support local activists' work without putting them at risk or making them too reliant on outside support. As one participant noted, the global crackdown on civil society "is not just a problem for local groups. It's also a problem for our ability to address [human protection] effectively."

This is particularly true for those groups operating in fragile or failed states where governments have lost the capacity to prevent (or are participants in the commission of) mass violence. Real change is most likely to come from supporting their leadership rather than through interventions that replicate macro-level methods or retain external control over final funding decisions. As one participant said, "When state capacity is eroded, it's often filled with civil society actors creating critical services and infrastructure." This only makes sense: local actors are far more invested in building societal resilience and ensuring stable governance.

Despite this, the international community continues to favor top-down solutions that often do not take into consideration the needs or interests of local communities. According to one recent study, many prevention initiatives "prioritize the role [of] international actors, overlooking what local and national actors are already doing to mitigate risk."[23] Participants pointed to a number of examples, including the White Helmets in Syria, as proof that homegrown groups working in at-risk countries can mobilize more quickly and engage more effectively than the international community, producing faster, smarter, and more sustainable solutions.

Participants agreed that current funding mechanisms remain too centralized, bureaucratic, and reliant on international NGOs for implementation. As one put it, "More money would be great, but a truly audacious goal would be to change who decides how it's spent." Donors will need to explore how development assistance and private investment can more effectively identify and support local change agents with the capacity to build resilience from the bottom up. Another participant cited the National Seed Board in Afghanistan as an example of what can be done: "It facilitates success in local communities by identifying priorities, determining quality, and holding people accountable. It's also faster."

A detailed discussion of effective approaches lies beyond the scope of this paper. There are a number of existing models—including microfinance, block grants, community development assistance, venture philanthropy, and collective impact grantmaking—that merit further exploration. Governments and international NGOs should explore how they could work with tech innovators, foundations, venture capital firms, and social change entrepreneurs to inform such initiatives.

Another opportunity highlighted by participants was greater leadership by the business community, particularly when it acts in partnership with other interested actors. According to a recent Stanley Foundation report, the private sector is "frequently seen as politically neutral," giving it the ability to "serve as a convener and participant in private diplomacy."[24] One participant put it even more succinctly: "Think about what the three largest communications companies in Africa could do to prevent atrocities."

Several participants also highlighted the success of public-private partnerships (PPPs), citing examples ranging from the Kimberley Process to the aforementioned National Seed Board. Others pointed to the Stanley Foundation's recent policy salon on a PPP in the Central African Republic, which they thought could be the basis for a broader discussion on how PPPs could be used to promote early prevention and rapid response.

Strengthen the United Nations' Capacity for Proximate Prevention[25]

Although early prevention, regional coordination, and local leadership offer opportunities to take effective action before a crisis breaks out, there will be occasions when a government or nonstate actor commits atrocities. In those situations, the international community will need to move quickly to slow or stop the violence. In most cases, that will require the United Nations to act.

Participants agreed that the United Nations has made significant progress in shifting "from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention" but also concluded that there is still much to be done before it can be said to have the capacity to act before the crisis spins out of control.[26] To his credit, Secretary-General Guterres has recognized the challenge and already is taking steps to overcome long-standing internal fragmentation and encourage greater collaboration. These steps include colocating the regional desks of the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Political Affairs, strengthening the United Nations' mediation capabilities, restructuring his office to provide improved strategic analysis, and establishing an Internal Review Team to explore changes in the United Nations' peace and security architecture.

Participants applauded these initiatives but also suggested other measures the United Nations may want to consider, including defining what constitutes emergency response (and when it is required); incentivizing country consent for the deployment of additional Rights Up Front light teams; and creating Emergency Response Teams, whose human rights, military, gender, political, and mediation experts could be deployed quickly in crisis situations. Participants also agreed that Guterres should regard proximate prevention as a distinct initiative, separate from the Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace agenda.

Although participants agreed that strengthening the international community's capacity for proximate prevention was important, not everyone thought that the United Nations was the best means to achieve it. "The UN is too broken," one said. "It would be a waste of political capital and money, and United States-Russia-China tensions would just undermine prospects for success." Several participants urged exploring alternatives, including an independent body with its own mandate, similar in approach to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

A number of participants warned against relying solely on the new secretary-general. Guterres will need a coordinated campaign by civil society and other external

validators (particularly those in the Global South) to push member states to develop the reform blueprint, champion any changes, and serve as partners on the ground. He also will need a concerted media campaign to pressure member states and celebrate successes.

Increase Demand for Transitional Justice

Although participants focused most of their attention on preventing and responding to mass violence, they also acknowledged the importance of helping communities recover, particularly through the strengthening of transitional justice mechanisms.[27] They identified a number of ideas worth further consideration, including empowering victims to play a greater role in national-level transitional justice processes, making judicial procedures more accessible, and exploring community-based approaches. As one participant said, "We need to pay [more] attention to how we do things and not just focus on the [need]."

Participants explored the viability of developing a global transitional justice commission that could help identify gaps in existing practice, develop new case studies, and explore how transitional justice could be used as a preventative tool. Several highlighted the distinction between transitional justice and international criminal justice. "Global transitional justice is not the same as the ICC," one said. "The ICC has one purpose: accountability. [Transitional justice] is more about rebuilding societies."

Not everyone agreed that transitional justice was the most effective way forward. "It's hard to organize," one participant said. "It's very local and very personal." Some highlighted the need for multiple paths to accountability, including not only local courts and traditional justice mechanisms but also truth-and-reconciliation committees, commissions of inquiry, and stand-alone tribunals. As one put it, "We have to be more creative. We need to think about how to identify opportunities to pursue justice more effectively. We can't just [keep doing] what we're doing now."

In addition, there was a recognition that the international community needs to take a hard look at how it can make the international criminal justice system more effective and relevant. "I don't think the international community was prepared for what's occurred" with the ICC, one participant said. "There was too much focus on creating the institution and not enough on thinking about what would happen once the cases started." Another argued for major reforms: "We keep going back to the ICC. If we continue to rely on it [without reforming it], it will continue to fail."

Adopt a More Rights-Centric Approach to Countering Violent Extremism

Participants also highlighted the need for the United Nations to take the lead in developing rights-centric best practices on countering violent extremism (CVE).[28] Although the idea of CVE has been around for years, it came to new prominence after the Obama administration began to champion it as a civilian-oriented, noncoercive complement to its military-led counterterrorism operations. Although its approach had numerous critics, many defaulted to US leadership, in part because its programs were emphasizing good governance, economic justice, and respect for human rights—and in part because they did not want to be seen as opposing such initiatives. As a result, the United Nations, the European Union, governments, and even civil society began to use the term (or a variation, *preventing violent extremism*[29]) to describe any initiative designed to persuade individuals and groups not to engage in radical terrorist activity.

It therefore is important to note that there was widespread skepticism and resignation about the Obama strategy, including its careful framing of CVE as targeting all forms of extremism, even before the unexpected election of Donald Trump. During the campaign and since taking office, Trump has made it clear that he would pursue a far narrower course, blurring the line between counterterrorism and CVE and focusing on what his administration has variously called "countering Islamic extremism" and "countering radical Islamic terrorism."[30] Taken together with his restrictive immigration policies and harsh rhetoric, Trump's new approach has led many of CVE's longtime supporters to conclude that new thinking and champions are now necessary.

Lab participants agreed that the time had come to shift the focus from stigmatizing local communities to investing in them. The goal would be to "de-securitize" CVE by rejecting coercive policies that have been used by repressive governments to justify crackdowns on civil society and independent media in the name of public safety. As one observed, "we need to develop accountable and transparent policies that focus on empowerment from the bottom up, not security from the top down." Another argued that CVE initiatives "should put the protection of civilians at the center of policy and practice."[31]

Many felt that the United Nations should become the focal point for future CVE policy development. They viewed Secretary-General Guterres's plan to create the new position of under-secretary-general for counterterrorism as a rare opportunity to "set the gold standard" for a more rights-centric approach to CVE. They also discussed the idea of pushing the Security Council to define and disaggregate counterterrorism and CVE but recognized that it would be more difficult given the strong views of the United States and Russia.

Challenges and Opportunities on the Road to More Effective Cooperation

Given the challenges currently facing the human protection field, it is critical that the community work together more effectively. This will require close cooperation and collaboration among a diverse range of stakeholders in the public, private, and civil society sectors. Along the way, there are likely to be a number of challenges and opportunities.

Stop Pretending the Current System Works for Everyone

There is a crisis of confidence among many who have spent their lives promoting human protection. A number of participants acknowledged that they were unprepared for what they perceived as a series of shocks to the international system, including the Syrian civil war, the European refugee crisis, the rise of the Islamic State, Brexit, and the election of Donald Trump. What had appeared to be a gradually evolving web of formal and informal agreements on how the world works has proven to be far more fragile than many believed.

But for many, the liberal international order has never been any of those things. To them, the crisis of faith in global governance and international law is merely the culmination of longstanding dissatisfaction with and distrust of international institutions and national governments that have failed to deliver on their promises

of freedom and equality. Building an effective international system that ensures prosperity, human rights, and justice for all will require embracing alternative views on, acknowledging real grievances about, and accepting thoughtful criticism of an arrangement that has never been as effective or transparent as its advocates like to think.

Recognize and Defer to New Leadership

Given this, civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Global North will need to acknowledge the increased importance of working with and deferring to their counterparts in the Global South. All too often, northern CSOs have typically chosen to engage directly those governments and nonstate actors committing the violence. Although such an approach can help bring greater public and media attention to abuses, it is often at the cost of building the capacity of local groups to do it themselves.

For this trend to be reversed, northern CSOs will need to step back and assess whether public shaming alone is the most effective approach. Several groups—most notably Crisis Action, Peace Direct, and Videre—are already working with their counterparts in the Global South to build their capacity and resilience to challenge abusers. To date, however, there have been no assessments of whether such engagement has produced results.

In addition, public and private donors will need to give greater priority to supporting and strengthening broad-based, organic coalitions of local civil society actors (including not just CSOs but also the private sector). As noted above, this will mean an increased focus on decentralized interventions that give authority over funding decisions to local groups that have the capacity to identify priorities, develop appropriate strategies and tactics, and hold people accountable.

Don't Forget Gender

It has been nearly 17 years since the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, which recognized the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and emphasized the role that women and girls should play in conflict prevention and resolution. In the years since, a number of countries have adopted national action plans, and numerous CSOs have focused on how they could better integrate the needs and concerns of women and girls affected by the ravages of mass violence. That said, there is still much progress to be made, internationally, nationally, and at the local level.

Over the course of the policy lab, participants spent little time discussing the role that women and girls can play in human protection. This was equally true of those interviewed in advance of the lab. It is unclear whether this lack of a gender lens is because participants lacked the necessary background or perspective or is a product of their greater interest in other issues.[32] The Stanley Foundation and the broader community should ensure that future human protection initiatives and conversations include a stronger emphasis on women, peace, and security, with a particular focus on the crucial role women can play in local peacebuilding efforts.

Marginalized Communities Must Be Part of the Conversation

All too often, those most harmed by mass violence play little or no role in trying to stop it. Top-down initiatives that fail to incorporate their ideas and concerns will not succeed in building the resilience necessary for fragile societies to break the vicious cycle of misrule, state collapse, and mass violence. Better yet, the international community needs to find ways to ensure that those local communities most affected by societal violence take the lead—including management of development assistance—in identifying, developing, and implementing solutions that are relevant to their own experience.

Prevention and Response Are Crucial, but So Are Justice and Accountability

The recent focus on prevention and response is important and understandable, but so is helping societies hold accountable those responsible for mass violence. In the immediate aftermath of Rwanda and Bosnia, a revolution in the way the international community approached post-conflict justice led to significant advances, most notably the establishment of the International Criminal Court. Since then, however, a range of setbacks has led some to conclude that their earlier conviction that establishment of the ICC would be a game changer was misplaced. That would be a mistake: giving up on accountability mechanisms would only ensure that fragile societies fall back into failure and despair. The international community should continue to explore a range of measures that deserve further attention and study: reform of the ICC, development of effective transitional justice and domestic accountability mechanisms, and tying justice and accountability to reconstruction, peacebuilding, and reconciliation.

Engage Even When You Don't Want To

CSOs in the Global North also must not reject engagement with those politicians and movements currently perceived as wishing to radically alter the liberal international world order. Public protest can be an important component of effective advocacy campaigns, but it should not be a substitute for the hard work of negotiation and compromise. Real solutions to the current crisis will require principled, pragmatic engagement with those most vocally opposed to effective solutions.

Single Tracking and Competition Are Luxuries

The challenges to successfully implementing an effective human protection agenda are so great that traditional divisions in the field, whether thematic, geographic, or resource driven, will limit or undermine prospects for sustained engagement. So too will the tendency to operate within a narrow policy space to the exclusion of other issues. The community needs to set aside its differences and explore ways to work together more effectively. As Mark Kramer, the founder of the Collaborative Impact Forum, recently noted, "the complexity and scale of the world's problems ... means that no single organization is alone capable of delivering a full solution."[33] But for more effective collaboration to happen, donors will need to explore how they can coordinate funding (and provide more general support) so that competition for limited funds does not derail cooperation.

Conclusion

The human protection community is facing a world that is radically different from the one it imagined as likely only a few years ago. The crisis in Syria, the rise of aggressively nationalistic populist movements, and the return of the great power gridlock have combined to produce conditions far less conducive to any sort of collective action to prevent, respond to, or help societies recover from mass violence. From South Sudan to Venezuela, from Yemen to Myanmar, the world sometimes seems paralyzed in the face of societal disintegration, civil conflict, and atrocities.

Yet it would be a mistake to abandon hope. There remain a number of strategic opportunities for smart action that could sustain and, in some cases, advance the cause of human protection. Taking such actions will require greater patience and determination, as well as a willingness to build multistakeholder coalitions that break down traditional hierarchies and silos. Closer collaboration among multilateral institutions, sympathetic governments, international NGOs, and local civil society is essential. So too is a willingness by government and private donors to rethink who, how, and what they fund in this field.

The challenges are great but not insurmountable—certainly no greater than those faced by previous generations who had to build from scratch the human rights and security architectures that so many take for granted today.

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Annex–Contributors

Assessment

To inform the future scope and direction of its human protection programming, the Stanley Foundation engaged Charles J. Brown of Strategy for Humanity to conduct an assessment of major risks, opportunities, and strategies in the current human protection policy domain as well as an external evaluation of its recent work on genocide and atrocities prevention. The report was based on desk research and interviews, conducted (in person, by telephone, or via Skype) in January and February 2017, with a range of experts and thought leaders in the fields of atrocity prevention, human rights, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, transitional justice, civilian protection, development, humanitarian assistance, multilateral institutions, and human security. Interviewees, listed below, came from a variety of backgrounds, including experience at international institutions, governments, academia, think tanks, and civil society organizations.

Akwasi Aidoo, Senior Fellow, Humanity United

Erica Chenoweth, Professor and Associate Dean of Research, Josef Korbel School of International Studies, University of Denver

Barbara Crossette, United Nations Correspondent, *The Nation*

Donald Deya, Chief Executive Officer, Pan-African Lawyers Union

Elizabeth Ferris, Research Professor, Institute for the Study of International Migration, Georgetown University

Melanie Greenberg, President, Alliance for Peacebuilding

Peggy Hicks, Director, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Sarah Holewinski, Senior Advisor, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, United States Department of Defense

Victoria Holt, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, United States Department of State

Andrew Hudson, Executive Director, Crisis Action

Heather Hurlburt, Director, New Models for Policy Change Program, New America

Mike Jobbins, Director, Global Affairs and Partnerships, Search for Common Ground

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Tod Lindberg, Research Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University

Nancy Lindborg, President, US Institute of Peace

Princeton Lyman, Senior Advisor to the President, US Institute of Peace

Dismas Nkunda, Executive Director, Atrocities Watch

Scott Paul, Senior Humanitarian Policy Advisor, Oxfam America

Shannon Scribner, Director, Humanitarian Policy Team, Oxfam America

Patrick Travers, Policy Advisor, Office of the Prime Minister, Government of Canada

Beth Van Schaack, Leah Kaplan Visiting Professor in Human Rights, Stanford Law School

Lawrence Woocher, Director of Research, US Holocaust Memorial Museum

Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only. Those involved participated in interviews as individuals rather than as representatives of their governments or organizations.

Participants in the Policy Lab on Human Protection

On March 8–9, 2017, the Stanley Foundation convened its Policy Lab on Human Protection in Adairsville, GA, which brought together a diverse pool of external thought leaders with internal stakeholders to refine ideas put forward in the internal and external assessments and to discuss the current human protection policy landscape.

External Thought Leaders

Haki Abazi, Program Director, Western Balkans, Rockefeller Brothers Fund

Heba Aly, Director, IRIN

Federico Borello, Executive Director, Center for Civilians in Conflict

Donald Deya, Chief Executive Officer, Pan African Lawyers Union

Jasmine El-Gamal, Senior Fellow, Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security, Atlantic Council

Tibi Galis, Executive Director, Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation

Alison Giffen, Director, Peacekeeping, Center for Civilians in Conflict

Alexandra Hiniker, Representative to the United Nations, PAX

Hans Hogrefe, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Refugees International

Mike Jobbins, Director, Global Affairs and Partnerships, Search for Common Ground

Gillian Kitley, Head of Office, Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, United Nations

Jennifer Leonard, Deputy Director, International Crisis Group

Gus Miclat, Executive Director, Initiatives for International Dialogue

Frank Okyere Osei, Research Fellow, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre

Savita Pawnday, Deputy Executive Director, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Sarnata Reynolds, Policy Lead, Rights in Crisis, Oxfam International

Gilberto Rodrigues, Visiting Research Fellow, Center for Latin American & Latino Studies, American University/Federal University of ABC, Brazil

Candace Rondeaux, Executive-Director, Global Research Network on Conflict, Director, RESOLVE Network Secretariat

James Turpin, Acting Chief, Peace & Security Practices Section, Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Cassandra Vinograd, Freelance Journalist

Internal Stakeholders

Mark Conway, Program Associate, The Stanley Foundation

Caroline DuLaney, Program Officer, The Stanley Foundation

Brian Hanson, Vice Chair—Programming, Board of Directors, The Stanley Foundation; Vice President for Studies, Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Danielle Jablanski, Program Associate, The Stanley Foundation

Ben Loehrke, Program Officer, The Stanley Foundation

Joseph McNamara, Director of Communications, The Stanley Foundation

Patty Papke, Vice President and Director of Operations, The Stanley Foundation

Keith Porter, President and CEO, The Stanley Foundation

Jennifer Smyser, Vice President and Director of Policy Programming Strategy, The Stanley Foundation

Jai-Ayla Sutherland, Associate Program Officer, The Stanley Foundation

Rei Tang, Associate Program Officer, The Stanley Foundation

Devon Terrill, Program Officer, The Stanley Foundation

Nathan Woodliff-Stanley, Board of Directors, The Stanley Foundation; Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado

Facilitator

Charles J. Brown, Managing Director, Strategy for Humanity

Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only. Those involved participated in interviews as individuals rather than as representatives of their governments or organizations.

Endnotes

1 It is also worth noting the issues that weren't discussed. They include gender, the Responsibility to Protect, refugees and internally displaced persons, and national-level implementation of atrocity prevention policy. It is unclear whether their absence was the product of gaps in the knowledge, interest, or expertise of those in the room; the way the meeting was structured; a belief that other issues deserved greater attention; or some combination thereof.

2 For example, one proposal—further exploring the nexus between human protection and disarmament—received considerable attention. However, it is not included in this paper, as participants felt it could benefit from a separate, broader discussion that would include stakeholders more familiar with the subject.

3 Lists of participants and interviewees can be found at the end of this insights paper. The comments are taken from transcriptions of interviews conducted before the lab, notes taken during plenary sessions of the lab, and concepts written up by participants during the lab's small group sessions. Most have been edited for brevity and clarity.

4 From this point forward, this paper will, for simplicity's sake, use the term *participant* to identify those interviewed prior to the lab and those who took part in it.

5 It is important to reiterate that atrocity prevention does not necessarily mean military action. Some of these cases did require a kinetic operation or the deployment of peacekeepers, but a number of others were resolved through the effective use of diplomacy, public pressure, economic sanctions, and other measures.

6 Michael McFaul, "Let's Get the Facts Right on Foreign Involvement in Our Elections," *Washington Post*, December 10, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2016/12/10/lets-get-the-facts-right-on-foreign-involvement-in-our-elections/?utm_term=.b01541b922cd.

7 United Nations, Office of the Secretary-General, "Secretary-General's Message to the Sixth Moscow Conference on International Security," April 26, 2017, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2017-04-26/secretary-generals-message-sixth-moscow-conference-international.

8 This definition of early prevention is drawn from the report of the Experts Committee on Preventing Mass Violence, *A Necessary Good: U.S. Leadership on Preventing Mass Atrocities,* Friends Committee on National Legislation, 2016, p. 9, https://www.fcnl.org/documents/142.

9 Several participants also pointed out that early prevention is consistent with a public health approach to atrocity prevention, as it emphasizes risk factors and resiliencies in countries at significant (but not imminent) risk of mass violence. Kofi Annan, the former UN secretary-general, liked to cite an old proverb that makes the same point: "It is difficult to find money for medicine, but easy to find it for a coffin." Quoted in Andrew Mack and Kathryn Furlong, *When Aspiration Exceeds Capability: The UN and Conflict Prevention*, Liu Institute for Global Affairs, University of British Columbia, March 2016, p. 19, http://liu.arts.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/When-Aspiration-Exceeds-Capability.pdf.

10 IEP, *Measuring Peacebuilding Cost-Effectiveness,* IEP, 2017, p. 3, http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Measuring-Peacebuilding_WEB1.pdf.

11 Ibid., pp. 3–4.

12 Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2011), p. 200.

13 IEP, *Measuring Peacebuilding*, p. 4 Private donors also struggle to focus on prevention. According to a 2016 study by the Foundation Center and the Peace and Security Funders Group, "Grantmaking around conflict prevention accounted for a very small proportion of overall dollars in peace and security." See Alexandra I. Toma and Rachel LaForgia, *Peace and Security Funding Index: An Analysis of Global Foundation Grantmaking*, The Foundation Center and Peace and Security Funders Group, 2016, http://peaceandsecurityindex.org/wp-content/themes/peaceandsecurity/images/PSFG-report.pdf.

14 The 40-years figure comes from World Bank, *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development*, World Bank, 2011, p. 12, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/WDR2011_Full_Text.pdf.

[15] Antonio Guterres, "The Vision of the Secretary-General on Prevention," May 3, 2017, p. 1. Copy provided to the author.

[16] Antonio Guterres to All Permanent Representatives of Member States of the United Nations, May 3, 2017. Copy provided to the author.

[17] An interesting example of this dilemma is Rwanda, which IEP identifies as a "peacebuilding success" but which also ranks high on several early warning lists. See IEP, *Measuring Peacebuilding,* pp. 2, 31–38. For an example of an early warning list that raises concerns about Rwanda, see the Early Warning Project, whose Statistical Risk Assessment ranks Rwanda as at greater risk of state-led mass killing than Syria, Zimbabwe, and Libya, among others. https://www.earlywarningproject.org/risk_assessments.

[18] The Stanley Foundation, "Draft Work Plan for Human Protection Programming," March 17, 2017.

[19] African Task Force on the Prevention of Mass Atrocities, *African Regional Communities and the Prevention of Mass Atrocities*, Foundation for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, 2016, p. 7, http://www.genocideprevention.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/African-Regional-Communities-and-the-Prevention-of-Mass-Atrocities-Final-Report-African-Task-Force.pdf.

[20] *African Regional Communities and the Prevention of Mass Atrocities* provides an overview of most of these subregional efforts.

[21] Jaclyn Streitfeld-Hall, "Conflict Averted Without Anyone Firing a Shot," Stanley Foundation, *Courier,* Spring 2017, pp. 3–6, http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/courier/courier89/Courier89.pdf.

[22] That said, creating a space for discussion doesn't necessarily mean better coordination. It is not uncommon for governments to organize dialogues with civil society and then spend most of the meeting talking to each other.

[23] Stephen McLoughlin, "Exploring Risk and Resilience: Implications for Comparative Genocide Studies and Mass Atrocity Prevention," in *Mass Atrocities, Risk, and Resilience: Rethinking Prevention,* ed. Stephen McLoughlin (Leiden, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2015), p. 4.

[24] The Stanley Foundation, *The Power of the Private Sector in Preventing Atrocities and Promoting the Responsibility to Protect*, policy dialogue brief, December 2016, https://www.stanleyfoundation.org/publications/pdb/PowerofthePrivateSector_SPC1216.pdf.

[25] The term *proximate prevention* is frequently used as a synonym for *collective action*—often but not always involving a military response—in crisis situations. The 2011 NATO-Arab League campaign in Libya is one (but by no means the only) example. See Dwight Raymond, "Military Means of Mass Atrocity Prevention," in *Reconstructing Atrocity Prevention*, ed. Shari P. Rosenberg, Tibi Galis, and Alex Zucker (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 299.

[26] The United Nations has used this phrase extensively since at least 1999. See UN Security Council, "Secretary-General Says Global Effort Against Armed Conflict Needs Change From 'Culture of Reaction to Culture of Prevention,'" November 26, 1999, https://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19991129.sc6759.doc.html.

[27] According to the International Center for Transitional Justice, "Transitional justice refers to the ways countries emerging from periods of conflict and repression address large scale or systematic human rights violations so numerous and so serious that the normal justice system will not be able to provide an adequate response." Although the specific type of justice mechanism varies according to the situation, it usually involves some combination of four approaches: criminal prosecution, truth commissions, reparations, and institutional reform. International Center for Transitional Justice, "What Is Transitional Justice?" https://www.ictj.org/about/transitional-justice.

[28] Although the term *countering violent extremism* is widely used, there is not an agreed-upon definition. This paper uses the one developed by Humera Khan: "the use of non-coercive means to dissuade individuals or groups from mobilizing towards violence and to mitigate recruitment, support, facilitation or engagement in ideologically motivated terrorism by non-state actors in furtherance of political objectives." Humera Khan, "Why Countering Extremism Fails," *Foreign Affairs*, February 18, 2015, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2015-02-18/why-countering-extremism-fails.

[29] The UN system prefers the term *preventing violent extremism* (PVE). For simplicity and clarity, this paper uses CVE throughout.

[30] Julia Edwards Ainsley, Dustin Volz, and Kristina Cooke, "Trump to Focus Counter-Extremism Program on Islam—Sources," Reuters, February 2, 2017, *http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-extremists-program-exclusiv-idUSKBN15G5VO*.

[31] As one recent issues paper noted, "The inclusion of human rights into countering violent extremism programing builds more resilient and safer communities. When human rights are subverted in favor of oppressive counter-terrorism policies, the results are catastrophic. Violations of human rights increases the grievances of individuals and communities at risk for radicalization, which may in turn push individuals towards violent action." Alliance for Peacebuilding, "Human Rights and Preventing Violent Extremism," June 2016, p. 5, *http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Alliance-for-Peacebuilding-OHCHR-feedback-CVE-and-HR.pdf*.

[32] It is worth noting that the interview and lab-invitation process strove to ensure gender balance.

[33] Mark Kramer, "Collaborative Cues," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2017, p. 71.

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The Stanley Foundation advances multilateral action to create fair, just, and lasting solutions to critical issues of peace and security. Our work is built on the belief that greater international cooperation will enhance global governance and spur global citizenship. The foundation frequently collaborates with a wide range of organizations using different forums, formats, and venues to engage policy communities. We do not make grants.

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